

# FOCUS

# Wild Arizona

## Key Words:

**Habitat:** the place where an animal lives, grows and survives

**Topknot:** a crest of feathers or hair on the top of the head

Have you ever heard that an animal's **habitat** is its home? That is only partially correct. A home is primarily shelter. It protects animals from weather and predators and provides a place to sleep. A good habitat is more than shelter. It has all the resources necessary for the animal to survive, including food and water.

To understand this better, let's look at habitat and home in relation to you. Get some paper and crayons. In one corner of the paper, draw your home. Be sure to leave some space. You will add more later.

Now, let's look at your house in more detail. It is designed for shelter. Thick walls and a sturdy roof protect you from the weather. You can lock doors and windows to keep strangers out. You probably have a bed to sleep in. But most houses meet other needs.

There is food inside the refrigerator and pantry or cupboards. There is clean water. At first, it appears that your home may be your habitat. But let's look a little deeper.

Where does the food inside your house come from? Most likely, it comes from somewhere else, maybe a backyard garden or grocery store.



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What about water? When you turn on the faucet, it doesn't just appear. It travels through miles of pipes from a central treatment plant, before it gets to your house. Even bottled water is delivered.

On the back of your drawing, list all the places your food and water

come from. There are quite a few, aren't there? Return to your drawing. In the space around your house, draw pictures of some of those places. Maybe there is a grocery store in the center, or a restaurant to the side.

To survive, you need access to more food and water than is currently



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in your house. You live in your house, but your habitat is the entire area you use to stay alive. Your habitat contains food, water and shelter.

But that is not enough. You need to be able to get to these resources. To explain, let's go back to your drawing. Tear off the corner of the paper that includes your house so it is separated from your other drawings. If the paper represents land that is safe to travel on, are you now able to get to your food and water? No.

The habitat still has all the things you need; you just can't get to them.

So this would not be suitable habitat for you. As humans, though, we are pretty good at solving problems. We can often make our habitat appropriate for us. Perhaps we buy a car or find new sources of food. To demonstrate this, tape your paper back together.

Is the same true for animals? Let's use a common Arizona bird to find out.

Gambel's quail are small grayish birds recognized by their distinctive **topknot**. They are commonly found in deserts and grasslands.

They often rest in tall trees such as mesquites and paloverdes. It is not unusual for them to build nests under smaller desert plants such as creosote or bursage. They eat many things, including grasses, seeds, prickly pear cactus fruit, mesquite leaves and even insects. Remarkably, they get most of their water directly from food they eat. However, if water is available, they will drink it.

Get another sheet of paper. Based on this description, draw the home for a Gambel's quail in one corner. In the remaining space, draw some other parts of the quail's habitat. How does it compare to your habitat?

Like you did before, tear off the quail's home. Can you think of ways in which quail may be separated from necessary resources?

A road may cut through the desert. A stream may run dry. A housing development might be built. These are just some examples of how a quail, or any animal, may lose its suitable habitat.

But there is good news. Although we need more than tape to do the job, wildlife managers are taking action to improve habitat. We build ponds to provide water. We construct bridges to allow animals to cross roads safely. These and other efforts help make sure animals have access to habitats that provide everything they need. 🦋

■ This feature is part of the Arizona Game and Fish Department's Focus Wild Arizona program, a free

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